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FM AMEMBASSY ASTANA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 1768
INFO RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 1867
RUEHEK/AMEMBASSY BISHKEK 8238
RUEHNT/AMEMBASSY TASHKENT 8121
RUEHAH/AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT 7293
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE 2327
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 1518

UNCLAS ASTANA 000315

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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: ALMATY NOTES, JANUARY 28 - FEBRUARY 8, 2008

¶1. The "Almaty Notes" series is intended to maintain focus on developments in civil society, the media, and the opposition in Kazakhstan's "southern capital" following the move of the Embassy to Astana.

Comments on President's State of the Nation Address

¶2. Political party leaders expressed various opinions about President Nazarbayev's state of the nation address. National Social Democratic Party chairman Zharmakhan Tuyakbay said "I have not been inspired. The address included many good words, but it is doubtful whether they will come true. Practically nothing has been said about political reforms." Auyl leader Gani Kaliyev agreed with Tuyakbay, saying that he had heard nothing new. Patriot Party leader (and Senator) Gani Kasymov said he very much appreciated Nazarbayev's announcement that additional funds would be allocated to build hospitals, schools, and sports facilities. (Interfax, February 6)

Maslikhat Candidate Loses his Case

¶3. On February 5, the Supreme Court rejected an appeal from Sergey Utkin, who had run as an independent candidate for the Almaty city maslikhat (i.e., the local legislative body). Utkin had challenged the results of the August 18, 2007 election, claiming that electoral protocols he had obtained from 10 out of the 11 election precincts proved that he had won his race. District and city courts previously denied Utkin's appeals and confirmed the official results, according to which Utkin lost to a candidate from President Nazarbayev's Nur Otan party. Utkin has the right to file a second appeal with the Supreme Court. (Interfax, February 5)

Communist Leader Proposes One-Chamber Parliament

¶4. "Because the current two-chamber parliament is not efficient, we have proposed setting up a one-chamber parliament," Communist Party leader Serikbolsyn Abdildin told a press conference in Almaty on February 5. This proposal was one of several that the Communists submitted to the Central Election Commission pertaining to amendments to Kazakhstan's election law. (Note: The Central Election Commission recently solicited input on amendments to the election law from all political parties. End Note.) The Communists also proposed that only half of parliamentary deputies be elected through a nationwide proportional party list system, with the other half elected in majoritarian territorial districts. They further proposed that city and oblast akims be elected through direct elections. Abdildin added that in order to "allow Kazakhstan to chair the OSCE in 2010 with dignity," the constitutional amendment which allows Nazarbayev to be continually re-elected without term

limits should be annulled. (TAN TV channel and Interfax, February 5)

Political Parties Support Strikers

¶ 15. The unregistered Alga political party issued a statement in support of miners from Mittal Steel Corporation and Kazakhmys who recently went out on spontaneous strikes following an explosion at a mine in Karaganda. The striking miners were successful in obtaining wage increases. Alga congratulated the miners on their victory and blamed the government for its failure to arbitrate labor disputes. Ak Zhol, Auyl, the People's Communist Party, and Rukhaniyat issued their own statement expressing solidarity with the miners, as well as with trade unions representing employees of healthcare and education institutions and members of the armed forces. (Alga press release, February 5; www.zonakz.net, February 6)

Turkish Workers Attacked in Almaty

¶ 16. On January 24 in Almaty, approximately three dozen individuals wearing masks attacked workers from the Turkish construction company B.N.N. Pegasus, the executive director of the company, Sechim Kose, told the media. According to Kose, the attackers were armed with knives and firearms. Four workers suffered injuries and were hospitalized. The Turkish Embassy in Kazakhstan addressed a protest note regarding the incident to the Government of Kazakhstan. According to the Embassy, more than 20,000 Turkish nationals work in Kazakhstan. (Novoye Pokoleniye, February 1, 2008)

Tightened Security in Almaty Schools

¶ 17. According to Deputy City Akim Serik Seydumanov, authorities are planning to install video cameras in Almaty schools. This security campaign was launched after a January 26 incident in Almaty school number 9, in which a grenade exploded and killed two people. Recent inspections have turned up grenades and mines in other schools. (Interfax, February 5)

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